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ABSTRACT

The Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, was established by the Canadian government in 1929 to provide residential education to orphan, destitute, neglected, and other Mi'kmaw Indian children aged 7-16. Since many Indian parents were poor and unable to provide for their children, they felt the school was a chance for their children to have adequate clothing and food as well as an education. The parents did not understand that when they signed school registration papers, they were transferring guardianship of their children to the school principal. The school's staff of 10 nuns and a priest (principal) provided room and board and education to an annual population of about 200 until the school closed in 1967. The 5-year-old author and her brother and sister were sent to the school in 1936. She was a resident at the school for 11 years. This book relates her memories, and other students' memories, of their life at the school: physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by the nuns and priest; inadequate food and clothing; lack of care when ill or injured; enforced labor in the kitchen, laundry, barn, and fields; and beatings for speaking their native language. Even though some children were allowed to go home for summer vacation and parents were allowed to visit on Sunday, no student was allowed to permanently leave the school. The school's suppression of the children's Indian language, culture, and heritage caused severe social and personal adjustment problems, which are related through quotations from former students. Rumored to have been built on an old Indian burial ground, and haunted, the remnants of the school mysteriously burned down in 1986. Government officials and the Catholic church apologized to Native people for treatment at the school in 1991. Chapters are: "Origins" (nonformal Native education and child rearing); "Everyday Life at the School"; "Work and Play"; "Rewards and Punishments"; "Ghosts and Hauntings"; "Resistance"; "The End of the School"; "The Official Story"; and "Out of the Depths." Includes photographs. (SAS)